



# Urban and Spatial Planning: Pragmatic Considerations for Plan Implementation Improvements (A Case Study of the City of Bor)

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## Abstract

The main task of planning documents is to achieve maximal rationality in the use of space, spatial resources, and balanced territorial development. The preparation of plans is regulated by a legislative framework, which embraces multiple phases and stakeholders. In a perfect planning process, it would be expected that all the elements are well coordinated and brought to common understanding, but in reality, obstacles and challenges can occur in any of these steps, especially in the implementation phase. Although a plan is fully prepared to be practiced, its implementation might be omitted. Therefore, this article analyzes the full process of spatial and urban planning from the perspective of plan implementation. The methodology is based on a combination of different data collection methods (interviews, fieldwork, direct observation) with the analysis of plans and the particular mention of those plans that picture the implementation issues the most. Also, legislative acts and semi-annual and annual reports on the achievements of the local government budget are analyzed. The approach indicates that plan implementation depends the most on the willingness of the government to perform changes in the system and to peruse punitive policy comprehensively. Although it is about implementation at the local level, the success primarily depends on clear definitions given in the legislative acts, freedom of the local communities to make their own decisions, and financial decentralization, side by side with the regional and local circumstances, institutional technical and staff capacities, and application of participatory planning that involves actors from various sectors.

## Keywords

urban planning, spatial planning, plan implementation, Serbia

## Introduction

The process of spatial planning, even if it is about the smallest spatial unit, encompasses an entire range of steps and participants. A harsh representation of the planning process divides it into plan-making and plan implementation phases, which overlap at some points (Hersperger et al., 2019). The beginning of the plan-making phase depends on the previously adopted decision on plan-making. Therefore, the plan implementation phase depends on it indirectly. A possibility that the final result partially or completely fails is relatively high if any of these components are misconducted.

An inevitable step in urban and spatial planning is the decision on plan-making, which needs to be embedded in the legislative framework and to be part of political will. Then comes the creation of the plan that involves a great number of experts, relevant institutions, and, in more successful procedures, active involvement of citizens. Those steps are followed by the adoption and implementation of the plan and its

evaluation through monitoring. As Taylor's (1998) rational planning model suggests, all the phases are equally relevant for obtaining desirable results. However, with the weakening of the traditionalist approach, the implementation seems to be taking prior importance in both theoretical and practical aspects of planning (Stefanović et al., 2018). As Beattie (2010) notices, implementation, as it is firmly related to other elements in the planning process, also represents a prior condition for the success of the steps that ensue later—monitoring and evaluation, and these two steps are inevitable in learning from the planning and for the improvement of

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plans. The same author also criticizes the emphasis put on plan-making rather than on plan implementation.

The plan implementation is understood as a process in which plans turn into transformations of (urban) space intending to secure controlled and envisioned change and development (Clifford & Tewdwr-Jones, 2013). However, space changes might be a product of uncontrolled, legally undefined or simply illegal actions, usually in the context of a lagging economy (Loh, 2011), which makes Serbia, with its past economic transition, an appropriate example to examine plan implementation deficiencies. “The incomplete implementation is an issue of governance and poses a major challenge for conceptualizing the role of spatial planning in urban development” (Hersperger et al., 2018, p. 33).

Contemporary urban and spatial planning has been practiced in Serbia for more than half a century (Trkulja, 2012). During this period, types of plans and the way they were named in the planning legislative acts were changing together with their statutory content, thus changing the destiny of plan implementation, too. Nevertheless, the essence of those plans had never been crucially changed. This is also applicable in the case of spatial plans, which are usually created for specific areas such as mining or hydro-accumulation basins, national parks, and tourist areas, for which Pantić et al. (2018) argue that the main issue is not in the lack of regulations or plans, but in the fact that plans are not being implemented.

The topic of plan implementation is relevant because the lack of implementation annuls the primary purpose of planning of all kinds, including both urban and spatial planning. As studies referenced above and later in the Discussion state, plan implementation is a field that still needs to be improved. Planning practice in Serbia and Bor indicates that as well. Therefore, the focus of this article is the question of why contemporary plans are being implemented at a very low implementation rate, referring to the main problems and actors in the plan implementation. This issue—as characteristic of the underdeveloped, developing, and even developed countries (Beattie, 2010)—is elaborated here concerning urban and spatial planning in the City of Bor.<sup>1</sup> This article presents the contemporary planning history of the City, its planning documents, and obstacles in their implementation to increase the understanding of challenges and issues in the planning processes, with the particular focus on, as Beattie (2010) defines it, the “implementation gap” between policy creation and its realization. Methodologically speaking, this study is embedded in an empirical approach based on empirical evidence collected within over a decade of practical experience and involvement in the urban and spatial planning development of the city. Therefore, the presented results are derived from the city’s planning acts, in collaboration with plan-making actors, analysis of the implementation of the plans, and annual reports on the achievements of the local government budget (investments). Finally, the results are discussed in the light of contemporary research that led to the conclusions and recommendations

on potential plan implementation improvement. As “spatial planning is rarely implemented as designed” (Hersperger et al., 2018, p. 35), this research aims to contribute to the still lacking empirical knowledge and generalization regarding the plan implementation process.

## Method

This article is conceptualized as a case study. As a case study approach involves not only document analysis, but relies on direct observation and interviews with different stakeholders (Schell, 1992), there are several data sources applied in this analysis. Triangulation of data collected through different techniques is in accordance with recommendations for the conduction of a case study research (Eisenhardt, 1989). Hence, combining different data collection methods with the analysis of the collected materials led to the series of conclusions that are based on the pragmatic experiences of the authors primarily.

The City of Bor (formerly Bor Municipality) is chosen as the case study. The implementation challenge is a general issue in the planning process (Hersperger et al., 2018). Hence, the examination of any example could be a solid basis for the drawing of the conclusion and potential result generalization. Therefore, this article focuses on the case study of the City of Bor for several reasons: (a) the urban center of Bor reflects the results of planning acts from its establishment to nowadays, (b) it has a fairly long planning tradition (counting from the 1970s), and (c) diverse data sources on the case study are available. Namely, Bor represents one of the rare urban settlements in Serbia whose establishment is not a product of a spontaneous process. In contrast, it was first established as a workers’ colony in the vicinity of a mining site at the beginning of the 20th century, which promptly developed into a modern urban settlement. Its first streets and buildings (cc. 1930) were initially drawn in plans and only then were they constructed and inhabited, which cannot be said for most of the other cities in the country. Not only the beginning, but the continuation of the urban development after World War II was always based on the decisions of planners and adopted planning acts, which makes it the case with long planning tradition. The fact that its development was and still is related to the mining activities contributed to an active planning history and a large number of plans. The last but not least, the City of Bor was chosen because the authors have an insight into the planning documents, the financial reports related to the plans’ implementation, and planning process stakeholders for longer than a decade now. This fact secured the obtaining of information, experiences, observations, and interviews that would not be available elsewhere and that was particularly relevant for the use of multiple sources of evidence and the chain of evidence establishment.

The main goal was to recognize challenges, obstacles, and improvement possibilities in the processes of long-term

spatial planning, which are simultaneously influenced by internal and external factors. To embrace the topic both comprehensively and concretely, the design of this research sets the main question and the accompanied hypothesis:

**Research Question:** Why are contemporary plans being implemented at a very low implementation rate?

**Hypothesis:** Plan implementation greatly depends not only on the success of the implementation phase, but also on the previous planning phases.

To break down the main research question, the article answers three subquestions:

1. What are the problems the plan implementation meets?
2. What are the actors of influence on plan implementation?
3. How can the plan implementation be improved?

Data collection methods, applied to obtain the main goal of the research, are embedded in an empirical approach based on empirical evidence (direct observation) and interviews (participative approach, fieldwork). More than 10 years of experience and fieldwork in spatial planning in the City of Bor, which included frequent meetings with the local decision-makers, representatives of public companies, and the local population (urban and rural), represent the foundation of this research. The documentation speaks about their attitudes toward plan-making and implementation, both in urban and in spatial planning, as well as about their understanding of planning, planning documents, and planning documents' roles. In addition to the interviews, this research also draws conclusions from responses (or ignorance) on questionnaires addressed via e-mails to representatives of various public institutions (e.g., social care center, kindergartens, schools, a public utility company for water supply and sewage system, public utility company for heating). The type of questionnaires analyzed for this article is the type regularly used in planning practice by certain planning institutions, which is a structured questionnaire with open-ended questions.

In addition to the analysis of the valuable data collected via interviews, questionnaires, and observation, this article also takes into consideration all urban and spatial plans adopted for the Municipality/City of Bor so far after World War II, but with the particular mention of those plans that depict the implementation issues the most (Table 1) (Figure 1). The analysis of plans and free expert estimation of their implementation has led to the understanding of the "implementation gap" and related challenges and obstacles, particularly for the parts of the territory where full implementation was omitted.

As the creation and contents of planning documents, as well as the entire planning procedure, depend on the legislative framework, the Law on Planning and Construction

through its transformations relevant for the implementation process from 2003 to 2018 is also analyzed and represented here. The third group of information sources are semi-annual and annual reports on achievements of the local self-government budget (in this case the budget of The Municipality/City of Bor). A systematization and analysis of the data presented in these reports are such because the internal local government documents encompassed the period from 2016 when the local self-government prepared them for the first time. It enabled the recognition of relations between the number of adopted planning documents on one hand and the realization of new capital investments, number, and amount of achieved donations from the national budget and other funds and the obtaining of new public land parcels for the realization of diverse forms for public use on the other hand.

Contemporary plan adoption procedures in Serbia (since World War II ended), also applicable in the case of the City of Bor, have always included public enquiry (public exhibition of each plan in local government premises) to collect opinions and complaints of all interested stakeholders. Since 2014, when the Law on Planning and Construction from 2009 was amended (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, 2009), an early public enquiry has been set as a standard step in planning, to include higher participation even in the initial phase of plan-making. Finally, the information collected within the process was one of the sources in this analysis.

Therefore, this article presents the results of substantial information collected over time and from different sources. Grounded in an empirical approach and with practical impulse, its results are expected to be of relevance for urban and spatial planning professionals in an international context.

## Results

### *Implications of Spatial and Urban Planning Regulation in the Local-Level Implementation*

As is presented in Table 1, the planning documents, which shaped the urban structure of the City of Bor the most to be as it is today, date from the 1970s, although building according to plans existed in the city from the very beginning of the establishment of the mining colony at the beginning of 20th century. As planning at the local level depends on the regulations adopted by the legislative acts at the national level, the following paragraphs point out the relevance of the recent legal acts that regulate spatial and urban planning, specifically in the last 15 years.

The legislative obliges investors in Serbia to obey regulations proclaimed in urban and spatial plans at any level—national, regional, and local. According to the Law on Planning and Construction passed in 2003 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, 2003), later amended and altered multiple times, this was directly related to the obligation of local governments and other organizations<sup>2</sup> to prepare such

**Table 1.** The City of Bor: Legislative Acts and Urban/Spatial Planning Documents (1982–2018).

Planning document	Implementation period
Plans of the new generation—adopted according to The Law on Planning and Construction 2009 and later	
<b>Spatial Plan for Bor Municipality</b>	Since 2014
Detailed Regulation Plan for 2 × 110 kV Transmission Line Corridor between SS “Bor 2” and SS “Bor 1”, within the Bor Municipality Territory	Since 2014
<b>Bor Master Plan</b>	Since 2015
Detailed Regulation Plan for 110 kV Transmission Line Corridor between SS “Bor 2” and SS “Zaječar 2,” a Section within the Bor Municipality Territory	Since 2015
<b>General Regulation Plan for the Bor Accumulation—Brestovačka Banja Tourism Area</b>	Since 2017
General Regulation Plan for “Crni Vrh” Touristic Complex	Since 2018
General Regulation Plan for “Stol” Tourism Area	Since 2018
<b>General Regulation Plan for Urban Settlement of Bor</b>	Since 2018
<b>Detailed Regulation Plan for Bor Cemetery</b>	Since 2018
<b>Detailed Regulation Plan for Brestovac Cemetery</b>	Since 2018
Older plans—adopted before The Law on Planning and Construction 2009	
<b>Regulation Plan for Seasonal Settlement at the Bor Accumulation—The First Phase</b>	1970–2017
<b>Regulation Plan for Seasonal Settlement at the Bor Accumulation—The Second Phase</b>	1970–2017
Regulation Plan—IV MZ Phase	1974–2018
<b>Regulation Plan for Brestovačka Banja Residential Area—The First Phase</b>	1980–2017
<b>Regulation Plan for Brestovačka Banja Residential Area—The Second Phase</b>	1982–2017
<b>Bor Master Plan</b>	1982–2018
Regulation Plan for Industrial Complex on VII km	1983–2018
<b>Regulation Plan for The Service Zone on the Bor—Slatina Road</b>	1984–2018
Regulation Plan for Brezonik Local Community Area	Since 1988
<b>Regulation Plan for “II km” Local Community Area between Nikola Pašić Street, Bus Station, Railway Station and Transmission Line</b>	1989–2018
<b>Regulation Plan for “Sloga” Individual Residential Area</b>	1991–2018
Regulation Plan for “Metalurg” Individual Residential Area	1993–2018
<b>Spatial Plan for the “Veliki Krivelj—Cerovo” Mining Zone Impact</b>	Since 1994
<b>Regulation Plan for Banjica—Krivelj Residential Area</b>	Since 1994
<b>Regulation Plan for “Staro and Novo Selište” Local Community Area</b>	1994–2018
<b>Regulation Plan for “Section 3”—Forest-Park</b>	1994–2018
Regulation Plan for “Section 7”	1994–2018
Regulation Plan for “Section 10”	1995–2018
Master Plan with Elements of Regulation Plan for Pipeline Corridor from “Mrlješ” Source to “Topovske šupe” Reservoir—Bor Section	Since 1996
<b>Regulation Plan for “Old Center” Local Community Area</b>	1997–2018
<b>Landscape Master Plan for “Crni Vrh” Tourism Center</b>	1997–2018
Regulation Plan for “North” Local Community Area	1999–2018
<b>Regulation Plan for “Section 8”</b>	2002–2018
<b>Detailed Regulation Plan for “New City Center” in Bor</b>	2004–2018

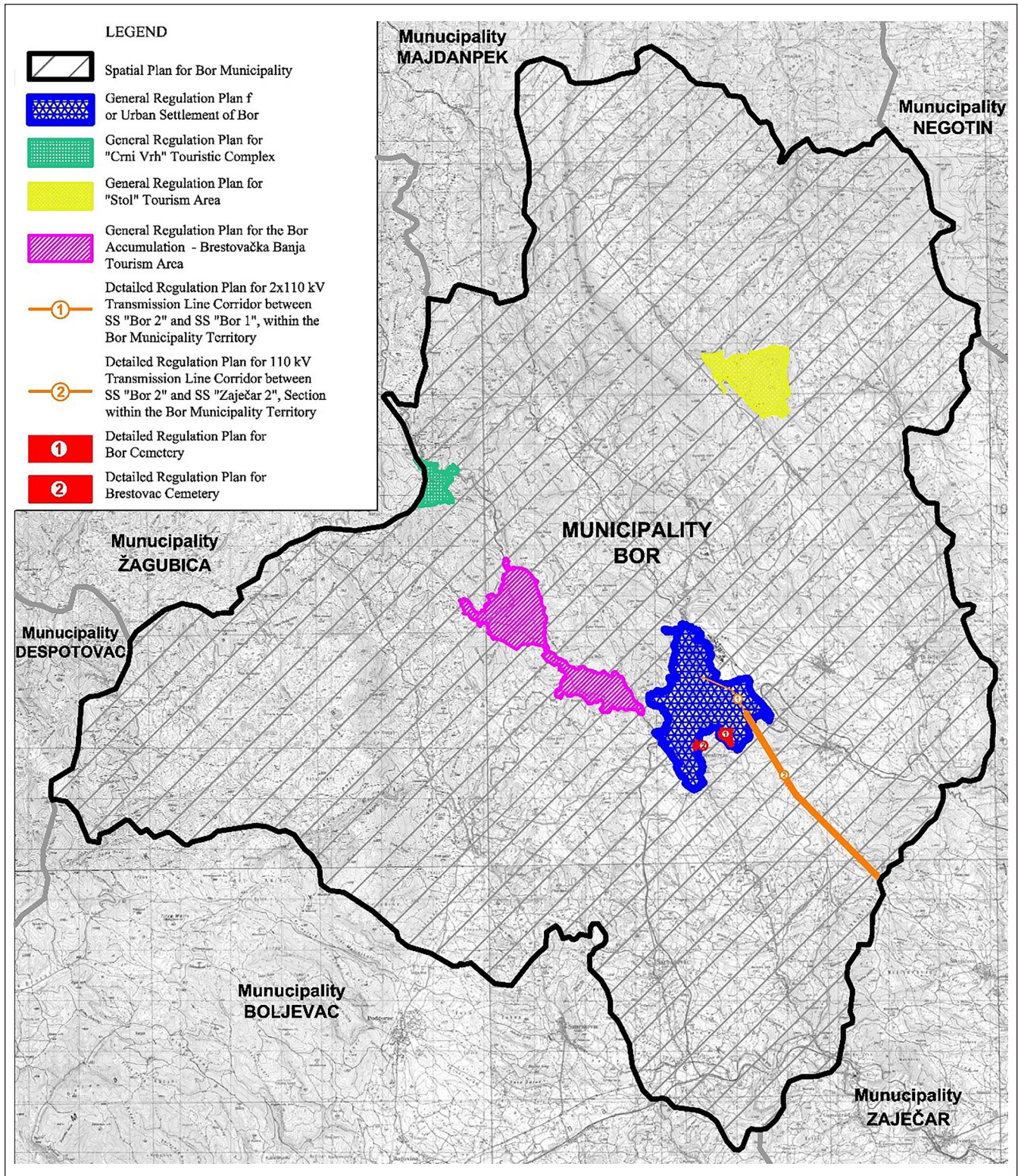
Source. Official Gazette of Bor Municipality (2014a, 2014b, 2015a, 2015b, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2018, 2017d, 2017e); Official Gazette of Municipalities (1970a, 1970b, 1970c, 1980, 1982a, 1982b, 1983, 1984, 1988, 1989, 1991, 1993, 1994a, 1994b, 1994c, 1994d, 1994e, 1995, 1996, 1997a, 1997b, 1999, 2002, 2004).

Note. List of references for the listed plans is given respectively. The year 2018 refers to the latest amendments. The titles in bold represent plans that were in particular focus of this article.

plans. The legislative act defined different sorts of spatial and urban planning documents, including both those of strategic and technical character. The document named “The Implementation Contract” was also defined by this act for the first time, but unfortunately, the term was not understood

well by the professionals in urban and spatial planning. Therefore, it resulted in the incomplete implementation of urban and spatial plans in the City of Bor.

In addition to urban and spatial plans, the Law also introduced two documents—the Abridged Plan and the Act on



**Figure 1.** The City of Bor: Territorial coverage by the present spatial and urban plans.

Urban Requirements.<sup>3</sup> They were envisaged as a base for the development of construction projects, but despite the fine design, the results were in contrast with the expectations.

Although an abridged plan was only an excerpt from the previously adopted plan, in contrast to the previous plan it had the power to allow the issuance of urban requirements for

**Table 2.** The Law on Planning and Construction (2003–2018).

Title of the law	Year of adoption	Means of public participation	Proclaimed planning documents
Law on Planning and Construction	2003	Public enquiry	I Spatial plans:
Law on Planning and Construction (amended)	2006	Public enquiry	1. Republic of Serbia spatial development strategy 2. Spatial development schemes 3. Special purpose area spatial plan 4. Regional spatial plans 5. Spatial plan for municipality (local self-governing unit) II Urban plans: 1. General urban plans: a. Master plan b. General plan 2. Regulation plans: a. Plan of a general regulation b. Plan of detailed regulation
Law on Planning and Construction	2009	Public enquiry	I Spatial plans:
Law on Planning and Construction (amended)	2014	Early public enquiry Public enquiry	1. Spatial plan of the Republic of Serbia 2. Special purpose area spatial plan 3. Regional spatial plan 4. Spatial plan for the local self-governing unit (municipality or city) II Urban plans: 1. Master plan 2. Plan of general regulation 3. Plan of detailed regulation
Law on Planning and Construction (amended)	2018	Early public enquiry Public enquiry	

Source. Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia No. 47/2003; No. 47/2003 & 34/2006; No. 72/2009; No. 72/2009, 81/2009—correction, 64/2010—CC, 24/2011, 121/2012, 42/2013—CC, 50/2013—CC, 98/2013—CC & 132/2014; No. 72/2009, 81/2009—correction 64/2010—CC, 24/2011, 121/2012, 42/2013—CC, 50/2013—CC, 98/2013—CC, 132/2014, 145/2014 & 83/2018.

Note. List of references for the listed plans is given respectively.

building construction. The concept of the act on urban requirements was designed in the way that it enabled vague interpretation of regulations given in planning documents, which often resulted in the construction of buildings in a way that is opposed to the intentions of the hierarchically higher planning documents. This gave power to administrative bodies (among other local self-governments) to allow construction by omitting regulations created for the assigned purpose of a given area. Thus, the possibility for manipulation was high until the Law on Planning and Construction in 2009 (Official Gazette, 2009) started to slowly regulate illegal construction. This was an effort of the government to establish a legal system for planning and construction by adopting a new planning act—the same as the previous Law only by its name. The new Law introduced a mandatory creation of various types of spatial and urban plans, different by content, structure, and purpose (Table 2).

The new approach clearly defined content, purpose, and responsibilities within the planning process. One of the advantages was the creation of schematic plans as constitutive parts of a spatial plan at the local level. This meant that each village did not need to wait for another document for spatial development and construction, but it was automatically defined by the adoption of the local spatial plan. In the previous version of the Law, schematic plans were not declared; therefore, each rural settlement had to wait for its

turn to get a document that regulates its spatial development. The innovation of the Law also made planning easier and financially more acceptable to the local government of Bor. This Law prohibited urban requirements license issuing for the construction in areas that are not regulated by a planning document, or, so to speak, it proclaimed that they can be issued based on and in accordance with the planning document solely. The Law, therefore, demanded the creation of all plans higher in the hierarchy (national, regional, and urban) before any construction, which is of great help to successful implementation. This hindered the highhandedness of certain individuals participating in the process. By this version of the Law, an implementation plan was proclaimed a part of the plan itself.

It was previously accentuated that the Law significantly improved by many aspects. Nevertheless, there were still significant shortcomings. Successful regulation of urban land conversion is one of the weak points of the Law while vagueness in the penalty system is another critical point. Correspondingly, the implementation of plans suffered due to uncompleted planning documents or, even more worrying, for they were not being implemented. The novelty of the Law from 2009 was the obligation of plan-making, however, with no clear proclamation how the obligation was supposed to be controlled. Consequently, some plans were not adopted for over a decade. So far, the late response of the institutions

responsible for issuing location requirements or other preconditions that precede building activities appears to be the main cause for failure, or to be more specific—the cause is a lack of cooperation between the institutions and plan creators. One of the examples is the Spatial Plan for the Bor Municipality<sup>4</sup> (Official Gazette of Bor Municipality, 2014a), which has not fulfilled its duty to activate the main resource of the region—the mining basin. This unsuccessful cooperation was not as much a result of the lack of communication between national and local subjects as it was the result of the absence of strategic development goals for this area that should have been defined by the state.<sup>5</sup> The issue continues with the cases where time requirements are met in deciding for plan preparation, but unfortunately not the plan preparation itself. The issue can be related to the loose definition of punitive measures in those cases that step out of the schedule defined by the Law. Besides, a system for a successful path from a decision on plan-making to the implementation is defined, but it is not followed accordingly—plans are not being created and adopted. The authorized Ministry, directly or through their inspectors, performs annual controls of plan-making. Although they encounter similar problems every year (there is a decision on plan-making, but with no actual results in plan preparation), the practice of adequate penalties is omitted. Therefore, the problem at the local level remains acute. This is a basic precondition for ignoring core principles of architecture and urban planning, consequently and potentially inducing irreparable landscape degradation. It results in spontaneous actions of investors in space where the actions are not directed by a planning document, which is particularly harmful in the case of the City of Bor where activities of high environmental impact (mining) are being developed.

Another manner of ignorance is when multiple planning subjects ignore a plan although it is ready for implementation. Usually, situations like this are the consequence of an unclear hierarchy of power between stakeholders, or, more specifically, the power of planners as professionals who understand the full meaning and relevance of planning which are still overpowered by administrative representatives who do not understand it very well, but do hold more power in terms of plan execution.

### *Challenges in Plan Implementation*

Although the Government sought a sophisticated planning system through the legislative changes in 2009 and 2014, this did not lead to expected results. An insight into the plans and annual budget reports of the City of Bor has shown that the plans are still being implemented in segments, if implemented at all. There is more than one cause for such an outcome, which represents an obstacle for success throughout different phases of planning—from the inception of the plan to its implementation.

The outdated data and incomplete sets of information used in the initial phase of plan-making are some of the main

reasons for failure of plan implementation, which is related to deficiencies of substantive law in Serbia. Different bodies, which represent local government, are authorized to issue specific requirements with the purpose to protect and develop local resources as well as to regulate buildings' construction when it comes to implementation. Their role is relevant in implementation when the need for planning document changes occurs. Therefore, they are obliged to submit information about location, conditions, and specific requirements related to resource exploitation. Often, they do not deliver the required documentation, which results in the adaptation of existing plans in which measures and land-use do not correspond to the latest situation in the field. This refers particularly to infrastructure facilities above and underground, economic development indicators, a listing of relevant stakeholders, outdated cadastral maps, state of forests, and so on. The delivery of incomplete information leads to irrational planning and the creation of unrealistic measures and subsequently does not fulfill the basic needs of the local community.

An additional problem is the unregulated status of data collected by each institution. Hence, agencies, organizations, and public companies consider the information confidential and they are not willing to share the information they collect, which is also of the utmost relevance for planners and correct implementation. The problem is partially accentuated with the lack of efficient punitive policy, which is why agencies, organizations, and public companies tend not to fulfill the task (provision of data) because the preparation of data creates extra work for them that adds more tasks to their ongoing daily responsibilities. In some cases, they also show a low understanding of fundamental urban and spatial planning principles. As they do not obey the law, it can be concluded that either the awareness of legally defined consequences is lacking or the awareness of the absence of sentence is high. Finally, they happen to submit outdated and/or incomplete data. According to the Law, these acts should be sanctioned in the form of financial charges, which, in practice, is not often the case. The reason for this is the fact that the charges would have to be covered from the state budget, which is opposed to the interest of the state (and local) government.

In situations where good planning solutions are integrated into plans, it may also occur that implementation of the plans fails. The main problem is the low financial power of the local government to invest in implementation. It could also be interpreted as an inappropriate implementation approach, performed through unclear procedures and the lack of know-how when it comes to plan implementation (Nikolić, 2013a). The Law defines the program of implementation as an obligatory document accompanying each plan adopted by the state. However, there is no obligation for the creation of the document when it comes to plans that are in the jurisdiction of local authorities (those plans only describe implementation principles).

The need for attentive planning is not often understood by political decision-makers. Therefore, they might have an

alienated attitude toward plan implementation. One of the commonly missing aspects is strategic thinking, especially in the planning process at the local level, which is the reason why private-sector stakeholders—expected to act in an implementation phase—are excluded from the decision-making process, despite their relevant know-how. The implementation of certain measures requires high tangible and nontangible long-term governmental investments, sometimes both locally and nationally—the implementation of plans often suffers from insufficient funds that cut the plan implementation on its way regardless of the quality of the proclaimed measures or efforts of local authorities. Several such plans were prepared for Bor, which were at the time of their preparation highly suitable to the local needs. Nevertheless, the political and economic crisis that was coming with the beginning of the 1990s was not foreseen and its occurrence brought a large development stagnation. The Master Plan of Bor in 1982 (Official Gazette of Municipalities, 1982b) set ambitious goals and defined measures that met the development trends of the time. In times of substantial economic, social, and demographic stagnation, previous measures, tailored to correspond to former needs and budget, have encountered numerous implementation obstacles in the contemporary changes. Therefore, new solutions and measures were required in the 2000s. Another example, which might have been less ambitious, was the master plan that regulated the part of the urban structure of Bor in the 1970s, referring to the already partially built urban fabric (Official Gazette of Municipalities, 1970a, 1970b). In this particular case, plan implementation was omitted due to the lacking funds for the construction of roads and also prior land expropriation.

As the local government has a crucial role in the implementation of a plan, a significant problem arises in the case when government employees do not have or do not share the know-how (Nikolić, 2013b). By certain representatives in the local government, terms such as *spatial and urban planning* and *spatial and urban plan* are equal to high costs and expenditures that are made “only” for the land-use designation; such individuals see planning solely as a redundant legislative requirement. Therefore, it indicates that the understanding of the plan implementation concept is challenged by this fact. The challenge of “understanding” the basic concept certainly results in poor implementation of the plans and consequently with unstable bases for the economic and the overall development of the local community. Therefore, a competent team of urban and/or spatial planners becomes responsible for accepting lower quality planning solutions and similar negative impacts on the local community. In Serbia, there is no license such as a “major planning license” that might be issued at the local level only to companies that fulfill planning requirements. Also, the current law does not define company requirements that must be fulfilled to consider them eligible for planning. Moreover, there are no legal bases to pursue the professionalism of staff and

the quality of equipment of planning companies. As there are no legal criteria that a company must fulfill to attend a tender, common practice is to choose the cheapest offer, which leads to poor planning outcomes and poor implementation results.

### *Positive Aspects of Changes*

Although it is about local context, some innovations made at the national level are also reflected on the local level and the City of Bor. Namely, the determination of decision-makers at the state level to establish a system of plans for the entire territory of Serbia made a positive difference indeed in practice at the local level, too. Since the changes of the Law on Planning and Construction in 2009, the legislative managed to force local government, which previously was not interested in creating spatial and urban plans, to determine a part of the local budget for plan creation and permit issuing, and even to encourage timely completion of the documents. Although the state did not perform punitive policy against local governments that did not fulfill their legislative obligation to adopt planning documents for its territory, the state still managed to achieve 100% coverage of the entire territory of Serbia by spatial plans.

One of the measures successfully applied by the State was persistent insisting on the excerpt from the current local spatial and urban plan for a certain location that the local government chooses to compete for grants when it comes to construction projects. The precondition was the same in the case when the local government required a document from the State that allowed expropriation of land and proclaiming the expropriation as a public interest. This measure was also successfully applied in the case of international donors that started to refuse any investment before proving the availability of certain locations in spatial and urban plans.

Positive effects in the success of plan implementation were also noticed after the inclusion of the participatory method in an early stage of planning (phase of defining first ideas), as well as the significant integration of nongovernment organizations (NGOs) in the process. Active engagement and cooperation of the local government with planners (plan creators) have also made a positive change, for example, in the Spatial Plan for the Bor Municipality (Official Gazette of Bor Municipality, 2014a) that has been implemented since 2014. This was the first planning document with applied participation of the local community during the planning process, although it was not obligatory at that time. Its success is recognized through planning solutions designed in a way that corresponds to the real needs of the local population, but still following the legislative framework.

The General Regulation Plan for Urban Settlement of Bor (Official Gazette of Bor Municipality, 2018), which has been implemented since 2018 and which was created with the participation of the local population in the planning process, brings significant changes in comparison with the earlier



planning and implementation practice and thus rises trust and faith of citizens of Bor toward local government. This plan entirely changes a part of the city in comparison with the previous plans, thus assigning those parts to public purpose and citizens' needs. Additional trust toward the local government was created through the prompt implementation of the document, just after its adoption. Another significant element of successful implementation is the engagement of the City Mayor himself or herself because it confirmed to citizens that the planning process and implementation are also relevant to decision-makers. One more positive change was that the citizens had a chance to take an insight into planning solutions during the creation of the Master Plan of Bor at the city's official webpage.

### *Answering the Research Questions*

The parallel consideration of measures/solutions defined in the contemporary urban and spatial plans of the City of Bor (or parts of this local territorial unit), changes in legislation concerning planning and construction and plan implementation have indicated the main problems that influence the plan implementation itself. As the planning process is defined by the acts at the state level, the analysis confirmed a rather high dependence of the local level on decisions and propositions made at the national level, especially in the centralized country such as Serbia. Referring to the urban and spatial planning legislative, the previous two subchapters of the paper have indicated that the plan implementation problems are initiated by (1) vague and ambiguous definitions defined in the legislative acts, (2) absence of a certain definition in the legislative acts, (3) high dependence of the local government on the national government, and (4) deficiencies in local circumstances:

1. Unclear description of preparation procedures of the newly proclaimed documents (e.g., implementation contract) and an unclearly interpreted hierarchy among planning and plan implementation process pertain in the category of vague and ambiguous definitions given in the legislative. Thus, earlier issuing of the act on urban requirements was allowed based on the planning act higher in the hierarchy, although the details were not given by the act. The vagueness of the propositions enabled biased interpretation of the planning documents and legitimization of construction that is against the public interest. The criteria defined for the selection of a company in charge of plan creation give priority to the least costly, instead of to the most competent offer. Therefore, it leads to the implementation of measures that do not respond to the needs of the local community. Wherever the different ways of law interpretation are possible, the opportunity for misuse of legislative increases.
2. The absence of the implementation plan as an obligatory document at the local level is estimated as

harmful for the implementation process. It leaves unclear the dynamics of plan measures, the responsibility of stakeholders, and estimated costs. Without these details, the plan implementation process is hindered and sometimes never accomplished. In addition, cooperation between institutions—both horizontally and vertically—is not defined with the precision that would enable the planning and the implementation process to run flawlessly. In contrast, those deficiencies hinder the plan implementation phase.

3. The high dependence of the local government on the national government consists of two aspects. The first aspect is financial dependence, for which most of the local governments in Serbia do not get the opportunity to step into the plan implementation independently of the state budget and state government's decisions. Local revenues are simply not sufficient. The second aspect is the difficulty to conduct the implementation in the zone of nationally relevant resources located within the limitations of the local territorial units, which is the case of the City of Bor and its mining resources.
4. Deficiencies in local circumstances are partially a consequence of the previously listed problems—unclear definitions, absence of definitions, and financial dependency. The deficiencies open the door to manipulations, which are usually reflected in avoidance of task completion or inefficient completion in the form of belated data provision and the provision of only partial or outdated data. The penalties for surpassing the deadlines are never being charged. Therefore, some institutions do not even deliver the requested data. This is also related to hiding inadequate knowledge of employees at the local level: Innovation in legislation and regulative is not followed by adequate training of stakeholders involved in urban and spatial planning—For example, employees in the local self-government slowly adapt to changes and keep outdated procedures in place for a longer period of time. On the contrary, the avoidance of task completion is also caused by the poor information and documentation database—That is, the data on basic activities of public utility companies and their results are not reported regularly; therefore, the data requested by planners require additional work, time, and costs in preparing the data. The omission of existing punitive measures, which could regulate the deficiencies, and maloperation with no consequences result in the opposite of what is expected: It empowers the negligence in the plan implementation process. The legislatively defined plan hierarchy is not always practiced—That is, plans lower in the hierarchy are ordered and adopted before hierarchically superior plans. Finally, the participatory approach does not

support equal involvement of all stakeholders, so the interest of the implementation remains partial instead of public.

Regarding the second research question—“What are the actors of influence on plan implementation?”—the presented findings show that the plan implementation depends on multivariate actors. The state government is responsible for unclear or incomplete definitions in legislative acts, for tolerating the surpassing of punitive measures and for not providing training alongside the legislative changes. The system set by the state also allows the engagement of planning companies that do not guarantee the quality of measures, which leads toward implementation that is not following citizens' expectations and needs. Therefore, the planners themselves take part of the responsibility in the implementation process, too.

Employees of local governments hold responsibility for avoiding timely and proper completion of tasks in the planning and the plan implementation process and for covering the lack of know-how with partial and slovenly conducted responsibilities. Participation should be primarily defined by the state and then properly and responsibly practiced at the local level. Therefore, both sides bear the responsibility for deficiencies in this process and its consequences in the plan implementation.

## Discussion

The plan implementation is a process aimed to transform space so that undesirable changes and actions are prevented from happening (Clifford & Tewdwr-Jones, 2013). Still, there is no surprise in the fact that the planning theory and plan implementation outcomes still often diverge due to the planners' difficulties to represent uncertain reality on the paper (Davoudi, 2018). However, it is not only the responsibility of planners, but also of governments' vision, political limitations, unplanned (informal) processes and mutually competitive attitude of institutions at the local, regional, and state levels (Hersperger et al., 2019). As in planning, it is also the case in the plan implementation that it depends on multiple factors, actors, available assets, circumstances, and power weighting between all these elements (Smith, 2017, as cited in Hersperger et al., 2019).

Similar to the results based on the City of Bor case study, contemporary studies show that deficiencies in legislation, inefficient definitions, and unclearly defined time frames for certain phases in planning all lead to unsuccessful plan implementation (Bengston & Youn, 2006; Zanotto, 2020). Planning, as the concept and practice, is estimated to still hold strong political connotations, which makes it a tool of the government more than a tool of citizens (Shepherd et al., 2020). For these reasons and for the reason that the state is the main actor in creating the legislation, Hersperger et al. (2018) consider the governments mainly responsible for plan

implementation deficiencies and the creation of new and improved spatial and urban planning paradigm.

Lau (2015) addresses a high dependence of the local government and other planning actors on external circumstances, including dependence on the central government, hence indicating the need for increasing the independence of the local tier in planning and plan implementation. The decentralization of planning is certainly a tendency (Anafo & Inkoom, 2016; Kombe & Namangaya, 2016; Korthals Altes, 2002), but Korthals Altes (2002) warns that it is much more than just fiscal decentralization. This author emphasizes the necessity and relevance of increasing the local government capacity and competencies, which is in accordance with the warnings addressed by Kombe and Namangaya (2016). Although decentralization is generally targeted as an efficient solution, Firman (2003) confirms that the regional disparities might increase if decentralization is not introduced by considering multiple implication conditions.

One of the preconditions for successful decentralization is the participation of various stakeholders and the strengthening of public-private partnerships (Kombe & Namangaya, 2016). The participation in the planning process and implementation is recognized as depoliticization of decision-making, which is expected to contribute to the outcomes adjusted to the needs of citizens and public interest and it practically turns planning into a tool that belongs to citizens (Legacy et al., 2019; McClymont, 2019). The participation in planning and plan implementation is advocated as a precondition for reflection on cultural, social, and economic needs of citizens to shrink the gap between the planned measures and their effects at the moment they are implemented (Lau, 2015; Legacy et al., 2019) and increase the transparency of the process and citizens' awareness on what planning is (Erdiaw-Kwasie & Basson, 2017), thus securing the success of implementation. Therefore, participation should not be limited to decision-making only but also applied in plan implementation (Erdiaw-Kwasie & Basson, 2017; Mäntysalo et al., 2019), whereas the implementation of one's own decisions and actions guarantees a higher level of satisfaction. Both institutions and individuals are to be involved in the participatory process (Sartorio et al., 2018), which is also relevant for the establishment of new partnerships and thus new sources of the plan implementation financing (Mäntysalo et al., 2019).

The use of online participatory technologies has been increasing by planning institutions worldwide (Conroy & Evans-Cowley, 2006). However, a consensus on this has still not been reached because the opponents consider that it rises inequity and harms social justice. After all, not all citizens have the same technical equipment and engagement within this field (Afzalan & Muller, 2018). In the case of Serbia, skepticism might particularly be the point because citizens in rural areas either do not have an interest in using the internet or do not have access to it (lack of installations). As Afzalan and Muller (2018) state, the results of online technology participation will mostly

depend on the way those data are implemented, but they recommend that this approach is used at least in cooperation between institutions involved in the planning process. If such a practice is established, it would help in overcoming the share of data between relevant city authorities and planners. Consequently, that would improve planning solutions and secure a more successful implementation.

Hopkins and Knaap (2018) analyzed the planning theory and the plan implementation starting with Altshuler (1965), who was highly skeptical regarding successful implementation of comprehensive plans; then Davidoff (1965), who believed in success if advocacy planning (participative planning) was applied; and Innes (1996), who supported participation in which all actors considered not their interests only, but interests of other parties as well. The planning and plan implementation undoubtedly go through constant adaptation and transformation. Lately, the changes focus on reinventing the role of planners in new circumstances (e.g., postpoliticization process; McClymont, 2019) and new participation processes—more critical, but only productive (Legacy et al., 2019).

As it was shown in the case of the City of Bor, other cities and countries deal with the plan implementation difficulties as well, due to the circumstance at the local level. Among these obstacles, Hersperger et al. (2018) list staff structure in local institutions, current socioeconomic circumstances, and interests of investors. The implementation can be hindered by external impacts that are manifested at the municipal level, such as general political constraints and informal processes developing spontaneously and independently of spatial planning (Forester, 1989; Maksin-Mičić, 2005; Tudor et al., 2014, as cited in Hersperger et al., 2018). It was stressed in previous paragraphs that capacity and competencies at the local level are preconditions for successful decentralization, hence plan implementation. The capacities refer not only to staff numbers but also to contemporary technical equipment and staff's competencies to use the equipment (Sartorio et al., 2018; Zanotto, 2020). Such deficiencies are not only an obstacle for the implementation processes, but also directly to the employees who are demotivated and frustrated with doing multiple tasks, working with outdated equipment, and their work being underestimated in comparison with political interests (Sartorio et al., 2018; Zanotto, 2020).

Due to the deficiencies at the local level, Zanotto (2020) notices that the private sector takes advantage in place of the public sector in the field of the plan implementation. However, despite the participation diversification, public institutions should remain the backbone in the planning and the plan implementation process (Lowndes, 2001:1958, as cited in Sartorio et al., 2018).

## Conclusion

Implementation is one of the final steps in the planning process and is preceded by various steps relevant to the fate of

the plan. A plan with no implementation is equal to not having a plan at all. Therefore, it cannot be said that modern planning is in practice if it lacks implementation, although a high-quality planning document is on the table. The empirical approach of this research and discussion in the light of contemporary planning theory leads to the conclusion that plan implementation depends on the prior phases of the planning process significantly and they show the high dependency of the local level on actions and decisions of the national government. Therefore, even when it comes to planning and plan implementation at the local level, the state has a crucial role. It acts through decision-making, legislation adoption, and the media.

Although the need for the creation and implementation of spatial plans that meet the requirements of the local community and inhabitants rises, it appears that the full implementation of the plans is still being hindered. As the case of the City of Bor indicates, some of the planning documents have set high goals or currently unrealistic measures because they were created in times of economic stability in the country. Thus, the plans have never reached their full implementation due to the economic and social transition that took place for a longer period than expected. Bearing this in mind, breaking down the complex and long-term horizon plans into phases might ease organization and provision of funds for their implementation. Hence, increasing plan implementation chances and efficiency.

Difficulties in plan implementation also appear to be the product of factors such as frequent change of rules and non-transparent approaches and procedures, inadequate input data necessary for successful planning, weak motivation of the local government to keep plan implementation complete, financial difficulties in plan implementation, vaguely defined implementation process, or the fact that government representatives are not always fully acquainted with urban and spatial planning paradigms. This entire list impedes the implementation of plans in various phases. Therefore, the reason for contemporary plans being implemented at a very low implementation rate is their great dependency not only on the success of the implementation phase itself but also on the previous planning phases, which makes the path toward successful implementation complex and challenging.

The problems the plan implementation meets can be generally put in the following categories: (a) vague and ambiguous definitions defined in the legislative acts, (b) absence of a certain definition in the legislative acts, (c) high dependence of the local government on the national government, and (d) deficiencies in local circumstances. This confirms the fact that plan implementation depends not only on other planning phases but also on multivariate actors: both state and local governments, other institutions at the local level involved in the planning process, and ultimately planners themselves.

Finally, this article sets the research question, "How can plan implementation be improved?" Generally speaking, it

can be improved by solving the identified issues—developing more specific and clearer legislative, decentralizing power by devolving fiscal and decision-making independence, and improving institutional capacities at the local level. Therefore, the main role in plan implementation and the entire planning process improvement pertains to the state as the only actor with the power to change legislation, including decentralization of the budget; apply the punitive system to its execution; and regulate timeframes for certain actions.

If we went into more detail, the analyzed literature and empirical results drawn from the planning history of The City of Bor indicate more concrete suggestions. Regarding the state actions, there is the need to overcome the decrease in plans' quality caused by the choice of the financially most appealing offer. An introduction of legal criteria that a company (applying for plan-making) must fulfill to participate in a tender might contribute to the solution of the problem. A potential solution to the problem could be clearly defined criteria for the evaluation of the applying companies, as well as engagement of staff adequately trained in urban and spatial planning in tasks that involve the creation of criteria and evaluation of competitors.

The existing system also requires adaptations in the light of punitive measures, which should be more rigidly defined in the existing legislation to solve noncompliance to the regulations regarding issuing required documents, data sets or ignorance on required plan-making and plan implementation, and so on. The adaptation of the legislation should take into consideration rather the development of personal responsibility in performing such obligations than addressing the state or local government. To avoid problems, relevant stakeholders have to be legally obliged to submit required materials promptly and keep their database regularly updated.

The local circumstances influencing the implementation processes should address both employees and technical conditions provided to them. The employees in both state and local governments must be properly educated to at least understand, if not to perform, tasks in the process of urban and/or spatial planning in all its phases. The availability of data in the form of a global information system (GIS) would enable better implementation of the planning documents. This would be a way to present the current state of the plan implementation process transparently and available to all stakeholders and potential decision-makers.

Another relevant precondition addressed in the literature is the participation of different sectors, which is applied both in the plan-making and implementation phases because the success of implementation relies on the solutions tailored according to the current needs and expectations of the local population and investors. The innovation in the form of introduction of early enquiry into the planning legislative of Serbia can be taken as an improvement, but the observations in practice have shown that it still does not elevate participation to the level at which all interested parties are given the chance to shape development ideas in a debate. Some of the

improvements might provide an interactive role to citizens by their involvement through social media (Schweitzer, 2014), especially concerning the virtual participation value recognized in the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Cyber Agora Debate About “Virtual Public Planning Participation: Hype or New Normal?” organized by the International Society of City and Regional Planners [ISOCARP] in July 2020). Parallely, the system should increase the share of citizens and investors who are informed (if not educated) about what plan-making and plan implementation is. The organization and promotion of (online) public debates and short surveys at the local government webpage are potential tools of participation improvement that do not necessarily require high expenditures. Besides, the involvement of citizens in decision-making is expected to bring relevant changes in the implementation phase because the publicity of data and planning procedures make higher pressure on responsible institutions and individuals in plan realization.


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### Notes

1. City in eastern Serbia—urban settlement which is one of the rare in Serbia that has been developed according to planning documents since its establishment.
2. Obligation of spatial plans development for special purposes areas may be requested from other organizations that use area such as mining complexes, energetic and hydro basins, traffic corridors, touristic areas, and so on. The state also has obligation to develop plans for nationally relevant projects and interventions in space of significant impact.
3. According to current Law (2018), those are information about location and location requirements.
4. The plan was adopted before Bor was assigned the status of a city. Therefore, it holds “municipality” in the title.
5. According to legislation in Serbia, decision on research and exploitation of mining basins are to be made at the state level, and therefore, they are not in jurisdiction of local authorities.

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